Cutting Out

SAMUEL G BLYTHE

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Pacific School of
Religion
Berkeley, Calif.

CUTTING IT OUT

By the Same Author

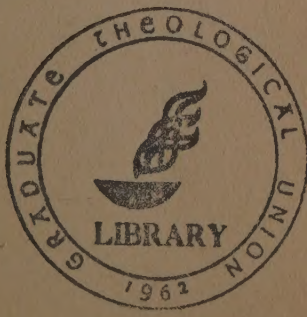
THE FUN OF GETTING THIN

CUTTING IT OUT

HOW TO GET ON THE WATERWAGON AND STAY THERE

BY

SAMUEL G. BLYTHE



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Publisher's Note

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CUTTING IT OUT

CHAPTER I

WHY I QUIT

FIRST off, let me state the object of the meeting: This is to be a record of sundry experiences centering round a stern resolve to get on the waterwagon and a sterner attempt to stay there. It is an entirely personal narrative of a strictly personal set of circumstances. It is not a temperance lecture, or a temperance tract, or a chunk of advice, or a shuddering recital of the woes of a horrible ex-

ample, or a warning, or an admonition—or anything at all but a plain tale of an adventure that started out rather vaguely and wound up rather satisfactorily.

I am no brand that was snatched from the burning; no sot who picked himself or was picked from the gutter; no drunkard who almost wrecked a promising career; no constitutional or congenital souse. I drank liquor the same way hundreds of thousands of men drink it—drank liquor and attended to my business, and got along well, and kept my health, and provided for my family, and maintained my position in the community. I felt I had a perfect right

to drink liquor just as I had a perfect right to stop drinking it. I never considered my drinking in any way immoral.

I was decent, respectable, a gentleman, who drank only with gentlemen and as a gentleman should drink if he pleases. I didn't care whether any one else drank—and do not now. I didn't care whether any one else cared whether I drank—and do not now. I am no reformer, no lecturer, no preacher. I quit because I wanted to, not because I had to. I didn't swear off, nor take any vow, nor sign any pledge. I am no moral censor. It is even possible that I might go out this afternoon and take a drink. I am

quite sure I shall not—but I might. As far as my trip into Teetotal Land is concerned, it is an individual proposition and nothing else. I am no example for other men who drink as much as I did, or more, or less—but I assume my experiences are somewhat typical, for I am sure my drinking was very typical; and a recital of those experiences and the conclusions thereon is what is before the house.

I quit drinking because I quit drinking. I had a very fair batting average in the Booze League — as good as I thought necessary; and I knew if I stopped when my record was good the situation would be satisfactory to me, whether it

was to any other person or not. Moreover, I figured it out that the time to stop drinking was when it wasn't necessary to stop—not when it was necessary. I had been observing during the twenty years I had been drinking, more or less, and I had known a good many men who stopped drinking when the doctors told them to. Furthermore, it had been my observation that when a doctor tells a man to stop drinking it usually doesn't make much difference whether he stops or not. In a good many cases he might just as well keep on and die happily, for he's going to die anyhow; and the few months he will grab through his abstinence will

not amount to anything when the miseries of that abstinence are duly chalked up in the debit column.

Therefore, applying the cold, hard logic of the situation to it, I decided to beat the liquor to it.

That was the reason for stopping—purely selfish, personal, individual, and not concerned with the welfare of any other person on earth — just myself. I had taken good care of myself physically and I knew I was sound everywhere. I wasn't sure how long I could keep sound and continue drinking. So I decided to stop drinking and keep sound. I noticed that a good many men of the same age as myself and the same habits as myself were be-

ginning to show signs of wear and tear. A number of them blew up with various disconcerting maladies and a number more died. Soon after I was forty years of age I noticed I began to go to funerals oftener than I had been doing—funerals of men between forty and forty-five I had known socially and convivially; that these funerals occurred quite regularly, and that the doctor's certificate, more times than not, gave Bright's Disease and other similar diseases in the cause-of-death column. All of these funerals were of men who were good fellows, and we mourned their loss. Also we generally took a few drinks to their memories.

Then came a time when this funeral business landed on me like a pile-driver. Inside of a year four or five of the men I had known best, the men I had loved best, the men who had been my real friends and my companions, died, one after another. Also some other friends developed physical derangements I knew were directly traceable to too much liquor. Both the deaths and the derangements had liquor as a contributing if not as a direct cause. Nobody said that, of course; but I knew it.

So I held a caucus with myself. I called myself into convention and discussed the proposition somewhat like this:

"You are now over forty years of age. You are sound physically and you are no weaker mentally than you have always been, so far as can be discovered by the outside world. You have had a lot of fun, much of it complicated with the conviviality that comes with drinking and much of it not so complicated; but you have done your share of plain and fancy drinking, and it hasn't landed you yet. There is absolutely no nutriment in being dead. That gets you nothing save a few obituary notices you will never see. There is even less in being sick and sidling around in everybody's way. It's as sure as sunset, if you keep on at your pres-

ent gait, that Mr. John Barleycorn will land you just as he has landed a lot of other people you know and knew. There are two methods of procedure open to you. One is to keep it up and continue having the fun you think you are having and take what is inevitably coming to you. The other is to quit it while the quitting is good and live a few more years—that may not be so rosy, but probably will have compensations."

I viewed it from every angle I could think of. I knew what sort of a job I had laid out to tackle if I quit. I weighed the whole thing in my mind in the light of my acquaintances, my experiences, my

position, my mode of life, my business. I had been through it many times. I had often gone on the waterwagon for periods varying in length from three days to three months. I wasn't venturing into any uncharted territory. I knew every signpost, every crossroad, every foot of the ground. I knew the difficulties — knew them by heart. I wasn't deluding myself with any assertions of superior will-power or superior courage— or superior anything. I knew I had a fixed daily habit of drinking, and that if I quit drinking I should have to reorganize the entire works.

CHAPTER II

HOW I QUIT

THIS took some time. I didn't dash into it. I had done that before, and had dashed out again just as impetuously. I revolved the matter in my mind for some weeks. Then I decided to quit. Then I did quit. Thereby hangs this tale.

I went to a dinner one night that was a good dinner. It was a dinner that had every appurtenance that a good dinner should have, including the best things to drink that could be obtained, and lash-

ings of them. I proceeded at that dinner just as I had proceeded at scores of similar dinners in my time —hundreds of them, I guess—and took a drink every time anybody else did. I was a seasoned drinker. I knew how to do it. I went home that night pleasantly jingled, but no more. I slept well, ate a good breakfast and went down to business. On the way down I decided that this was the day to make the plunge. Having arrived at that decision, I went out about three o'clock that afternoon, drank a Scotch highball—a big, man's-sized one—as a doch-an-doris, and quit. That was almost a year ago. I haven't taken a drink since. It is

not my present intention ever to take another drink; but I am not tying myself down by any vows. It is not my present intention, I say; and I let it go at that.

No man can be blamed for trying to fool other people about himself—that is the way most of us get past; but what can be said for a man who tries to fool himself? Every man knows exactly how bogus he is and should admit it —to himself only. The man who, knowing his bogusness, refuses to admit it to himself — no matter what his attitude may be to the outside world — simply stores up trouble for himself, and discomfort and much else. There are many

phases of personal understanding of oneself that need not be put in the newspapers or proclaimed publicly. Still, for a man to gold-brick himself is a profitless undertaking, but prevalent notwithstanding.

When it comes to fooling oneself by oneself, the grandest performers are the boys who have a habit—no matter what kind of a habit—a habit! It may be smoking cigarettes, or walking pigeontoed, or talking through the nose, or drinking—or anything else. Any man can see with half an eye how drinking, for example, is hurting Jones; but he always argues that his own personal drinking is of a different variety and is doing him no harm.

The best illustration of it is in the old vaudeville story, where the man came on the stage and said: "Smith is drinking too much! I never go into a saloon without finding him there!"

That is the reason drinking liquor gets so many people—either by wrecking their health or by fastening on them the habit they cannot stop. They fool themselves. They are perfectly well aware that their neighbors are drinking too much—but not themselves. Far be it from them not to have the will-power to stop when it is time to stop. They are smarter than their neighbors. They know what they are doing. And suddenly the explosions come!

There are hundreds of thousands of men in all walks of life in this country who for twenty or thirty years have never lived a minute when there was not more or less alcohol in their systems, who cannot be said to have been strictly and entirely sober in all that time, but who do their work, perform all their social duties, make their careers and are fairly successful just the same.

There has been more flub-dub printed and spoken about drinking liquor than about any other employment, avocation, vocation, habit, practice or pleasure of mankind. Drinking liquor is a personal proposition, and nothing else.

It is individual in every human relation. Still, you cannot make the reformers see that. They want other people to stop drinking because they want other people to stop. So they make laws that are violated, and get pledges that are broken and try to legislate or preach or coax or scare away a habit that must, in any successful outcome, be stopped by the individual, and not because of any law or threat or terror or cajolery.

This is the human-nature side of it, but the professional reformers know less about human nature, and care less, than about any other phase of life. Still, the fact remains that with any habit, and es-

pecially with the liquor habit — probably because that is the most prevalent habit there is — nine-tenths of the subjects delude themselves about how much of a habit they have; and, second, that nine-tenths of those with the habit have a very clear idea of the extent to which the habit is fastened on others. They are fooled about themselves, but never about their neighbors! Wherefore the breweries and the distilleries prosper exceedingly.

However, I am straying away from my story, which has to do with such drinking as the ordinary man does—not sprees, nor debauches, or orgies, or periodicals,

or drunkenness, but just the ordinary amount of drinking that happens along in a man's life, with a little too much on rare occasions and plenty at all times. A German I knew once told me the difference between Old-World drinking and American drinking was that the German, for example, drinks for the pleasure of the drink, while the American drinks for the alcohol in it. That may be so; but very few men who have any sense or any age set out deliberately to get drunk. Such drunkenness as there is among men of that sort usually comes more by accident than by design.

My definition of a drunkard has

always been this: A man is a drunkard when he drinks whisky or any other liquor before breakfast. I think that is pretty nearly right. Personally I never took a drink of liquor before breakfast in my life and not many before noon. Usually my drinking began in the afternoon after business, and was likely to end before dinnertime—not always, but usually.

CHAPTER III

WHAT I QUIT

I HAD been drinking thus for practically twenty years. I did not drink at all until after I was twenty-one and not much until after I was twenty-five. When I got to be thirty-two or thirty-three and had gone along a little in the world, I fell in with men of my own station; and as I lived in a town where nearly everybody drank, including many of the successful business and professional men — men of affairs — I soon got into their habits. Naturally gregarious,

I found these men good company. They were sociable and convivial, and drank for the fun of it and the fun that came out of it.

My business took me to various parts of the country and I made acquaintances among men like these —the real live ones in the communities. They were good fellows. So was I. The result was that in a few years I had a list of friends from California to Maine — all of whom drank; and I was never at a loss for company or highballs. Then I moved to a city where there isn't much of anything else to do but drink at certain times in the day, a city where men from all parts of the country congregate

and where the social side of life is highly accentuated. I kept along with the procession. I did my work satisfactorily to my employers and I did my drinking satisfactorily to myself.

This continued for several years. I had a fixed habit. I drank several drinks each day. Sometimes I drank more than several. My system was organized to digest about so much alcohol every twenty-four hours. So far as I could see, the drinking did me no harm. I was well. My appetite was good. I slept soundly. My head was clear. My work proceeded easily and was getting fair recognition. Then some of the boys

began dropping off and some began breaking down. I had occasional mornings, after big dinners or specially convivial affairs, when I did not feel very well—when I was out of tune and knew why. Still, I continued as of old, and thought nothing of it except as the regular katzenjammer—to be expected.

Presently I woke up to what was happening round me. I looked the game over critically. I analyzed it coldly and calmly. I put every advantage of my mode of life on one side and every disadvantage; and I put on the other side every disadvantage of a change in procedure and every advantage. There were times when I thought the present

mode had by far the better of it, and times when the change contemplated outweighed the other heavily.

Here is the way it totted up against quitting: Practically every friend you have in the United States — and you've got a lot of them — drinks more or less. You have not cultivated any other line of associates. If you quit drinking, you will necessarily have to quit a lot of these friends, and quit their parties and company—for a man who doesn't drink is always a death's-head at a feast or merry-making where drinking is going on. Your social intercourse with these people is predicated on taking an

occasional drink, in going to places where drinks are served, both public and at homes. The kind of drinking you do makes greatly for sociability, and you are a sociable person and like to be round with congenial people. You will miss a lot of fun, a lot of good, clever companionship, for you are too old to form a new line of friends. Your whole game is organized along these lines. Why make a hermit of yourself just because you think drinking may harm you? Cut it down. Take care of yourself. Don't be such a fool as to try to change your manner of living just when you have an opportunity to live as

you should and enjoy what is coming to you.

This is the way it lined up for quitting: So far, liquor hasn't done anything to you except cause you to waste some time that might have been otherwise employed; but it will get you, just as it has landed a lot of your friends, if you stay by it. Wouldn't it be better to miss some of this stuff you have come to think of as fun, and live longer? There is no novelty in drinking to you. You haven't an appetite that cannot be checked, but you will have if you stick to it much longer. Why not quit and take a chance at a new mode of

living, especially when you know absolutely that every health reason, every future-prospect reason, every atom of good sense in you, tells you there is nothing to be gained by keeping at it, and that all may be lost?

Well, I pondered over that a long time. I had watched miserable wretches who had struggled to stay on the waterwagon — sometimes with amusement. I knew what they had to stand if they tried to associate with their former companions; I knew the apparent difficulties and the disadvantages of this new mode of life. On the other hand, I was convinced that, so far as I was concerned, without trying

to lay down a rule for any other man, I would be an ass if I didn't quit it immediately, while I was well and all right, instead of waiting until I had to quit on a doctor's orders, or got to that stage when I couldn't quit.

It was no easy thing to make the decision. It is hard to change the habits and associations of twenty years! I had a good understanding of myself. I was no hero. I liked the fun of it, the companionship of it, better than any one. I like my friends and, I hope and think, they like me. It seemed to me that I needed it in my business, for I was always dealing with men who did drink.

I wrestled with it for some weeks. I thought it all out, up one side and down the other. Then I quit. Also I stayed quit. And believe me, ladies and gentlemen and all others present, it was no fool of a job.

I have learned many things since I went on the waterwagon for fair —many things about my fellowmen and many things about myself. Most of these things radiate round the innate hypocrisy of the human being. All those that do not concern his hypocrisy concern his lying —which, I reckon, when you come to stack them up together, amounts to the same thing. I have learned that I had been fooling myself and

that others had been fooling me. I gathered experience every day. And some of the things I have learned I shall set down.

You have all known the man who says he quit drinking and never thought of drink again. He is a liar. He doesn't exist. No man in this world who had a daily habit of drinking ever quit and never thought of drinking again. Many men, because they habitually lie to themselves, think they have done this; but they haven't. The fact is, no man with a daily habit of drinking ever quit and thought of anything else than how good a drink would taste and feel for a time after he quit. He couldn't and

he didn't. I don't care what any of them say. I know.

Further, the man who tells you he never takes a drink until five o'clock in the afternoon, or three o'clock in the afternoon, or only drinks with his meals, or only takes two or three drinks a day, usually is a liar, too—not always, but usually. There are some machine-like, non-imaginative persons who can do this—drink by rote or by rule; but not many. Now I do not say many men do not think they drink this way, but most of these men are simply fooling themselves.

Again, this proposition of cutting down drinks to two or three

a day is all rot. Of what use to any person are two or three drinks a day? I mean to any person who drinks for the fun of it, as I did and as most of my friends do yet. What kind of a human being is he who comes into a club and takes one cocktail and no more?—or one highball? He's worse, from any view-point of sociability, than a man who drinks a glass of water. At least the man who drinks the water isn't fooling himself or trying to be part one thing and part another. The way to quit drinking is to quit drinking. That is all there is to that. This paltering along with two or three drinks a day is mere cowardice. It is neither one

thing nor the other. And I am here to say, also, that nine out of every ten men who say they only take two or three drinks a day are liars, just the same as the men who say they quit and never think of it again. They may not think they are liars, or intend to be liars; but they are liars just the same.

Well, as I may have intimated, I quit drinking. I drank that last, lingering Scotch highball — and quit! I decided the no-liquor end of it was the better end, and I took that end.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN I QUIT

FOR purposes of comprehensive record I have divided the various stages of my waterwagoning into these parts: the obsession stage; the caramel stage; the pharisaical stage, and the safe-and-sane stage. I drank my Scotch highball and went over to the club. The crowd was there; I sat down at a table and when somebody asked me what I'd have I took a glass of water. Several of my friends looked inquiringly at me and one asked: "On the wagon?" This attracted

the attention of the entire group to my glass of water. I came in for a good deal of banter, mostly along the line that it was time I went on the wagon. This was varied with predictions that I would stay on from an hour to a day or so. I didn't like that talk, but I bluffed it out—weakly, to be sure. I said I had decided it wouldn't do me any harm to cool out a bit.

Next day, along about first-drink time, I felt a craving for a highball. I didn't take it. That evening I went over to the club again. The crowd was there. I was asked to have a drink. This time I rather defiantly ordered a glass of water. The same jests were made, but I

drank my water. On the third day I was a bit shaky—sort of nervous. I didn't feel like work. I couldn't concentrate my mind on anything. I kept thinking of various kinds of drinks and how good they would taste. I tried out the club. I may have imagined it, but I thought my old friends lacked interest in my advent at the table. One of them said: "Oh, for Heaven's sake, take a drink! You've got a terrible grouch on." I backed out.

I did have a grouch. I was sore at everybody in the world. Also, I kept thinking how much I would like to have a drink. That was natural. I had accustomed my system to digest a certain amount of alco-

hol every day. I wasn't supplying that alcohol. My system needed it and howled for it. I knew a man who had been a drunkard but who had quit and who hadn't taken a drink for twelve years. I discussed the problem with him. He told me an eminent specialist had told him it takes eighteen months for a man who has been a heavy drinker or a steady drinker to get all the alcohol out of his system. I hadn't been a heavy drinker, but I had been a steady drinker; and that information gave me a cold chill. I thought if I were to have this craving for a drink every day for eighteen months, surely I had let myself in for a lovely task!

I stuck for a week — for two weeks — for three weeks. At the end of that time my friends had grown accustomed to this idiosyncrasy and were making bets on how long I would last. I didn't go round where they were much. I was as lonesome as a stray dog in a strange alley. I had carefully cultivated a large line of drinking acquaintances and I hardly knew a congenial person who didn't drink. That was the hardest part of the game. I wasn't fit company for man or beast. I don't blame my friends—not a bit. I was cross and ugly and hypercritical and generally nasty, and they passed me up. However, the craving for liquor

decreased to some degree. There were some periods in the day when I didn't think how good a drink would taste, and did devote myself to my work.

I discovered a few things. One was that, no matter how much fun I missed in the evening, I didn't get up with a taste in my mouth. I had no katzenjammers. After a week or so I went to sleep easily and slept like a child. Then the caramel stage arrived. I acquired a sudden craving for candy. I had not eaten any candy for years, for men who drink regularly rarely take sweets. One day I looked in a confectioner's window and was irresistibly attracted

by a box of caramels. I went in and bought it, and ate half a dozen. They seemed to fill a long-felt want. The sugar in them supplied the stimulant that was lacking, I suppose. Anyhow, they tasted right good and were satisfactory; and I kept a box of caramels on my desk for several weeks and ate a few each day. Also I began to yell for ice cream and pie and other sweets with my meals.

Along about this time I developed the pharisaical stage. I looked with a great pity on my friends who persisted in drinking. I assumed some little airs of superiority and congratulated myself on my great will-power that had enabled me to

quit drinking. They were steadily drinking themselves to death. I could see that plainly. There was nothing else to it. I was a fine sample of a full-blown prig. I went so far as to explain the case to one or two, and I got hooted at for my pains; so I lapsed into my condition of immense superiority and said: "Oh, well, if they won't take advice from me, who knows, let them go along. Poor chaps, I am afraid they are lost!"

It's a wonder somebody didn't take an ax to me. I deserved it. After lamenting — to myself — the sad fates of my former companions and pluming myself on my noble course, I woke up one day and

kicked myself round the park. "Here!" I said. "You chump, what business have you got putting on airs about your non-drinking and parading yourself round here as a giant example of self-restraint? Where do you get off as a preacher—or a censor, or a reformer—in this matter? Who appointed you as the apostle of non-drinking? Take a tumble to yourself and close up!"

That was the beginning of the safe-and-sane stage, which still persists. It came about the end of the second month. I had lost all desire for liquor; and, though there were times when I missed the sociability of drinking fearfully, I was as

steady as a rock in my policy of abstaining from drinks of all kinds. Now it doesn't bother me at all. I am riding jauntily on the wagon, without a chance of falling off.

At the time I decided it was up to me to stop this pharisaical foolishness, I took a new view of things; decided I wasn't so much, after all; ceased reprobating my friends who wanted to drink; had no advice to offer, and stopped pointing to myself as a heroic young person who had accomplished a gigantic task.

Friends had tolerated me. I wondered that they had, for I was a sad affair. Surely it was up to me to be as tolerant as they had been, not-

withstanding my new mode of life. So I stopped foreboding and tried to accustom my friends to my company on a strictly water basis. The attempt was not entirely successful. I dropped out of a good many gatherings where formerly I should have been one of the bright and shining lights. There are no two ways about it—a man cannot drink water in a company where others are drinking highballs and get into the game with any effectiveness. Any person who quits drinking may as well accept that as a fact; and most persons will stop trying after a time and seek new diversions; or begin drinking again.

CHAPTER V

AFTER I QUIT

I HAD a good lively tilt with John Barleycorn, ranging over twenty years. I know all about drinking. I figured it this way: I have about fifteen more good, productive years in me. After that I shall lose in efficiency, even if I keep my health. Being selfish and perhaps getting sensible, I desire the remaining productive years of my life to be years of the greatest efficiency. Looking back over my drinking years, I saw, if I was to attain and keep that greatest effi-

ciency, that was my job, and that it could not be complicated with any booze-fighting whatsoever.

I decided that what I might lose in the companionship and social end of it I would gain in my own personal increase in horsepower; for I knew that though drinking may have done me no harm, it certainly did me no good, and that, if persisted in, it surely would do me harm in some way or other.

Sizing it up, one side against the other, I conclude that it is better for me not to drink. I find I have much more time that I can devote to my business; that I think more clearly, feel better, do not make any loose statements under the ex-

hilaration of alcohol, and keep my mind on my number constantly. The item of time is the surprising item. It is astonishing how much time you have to do things in that formerly you used to drink in, with the accompaniment of all the piffle that goes with drinking! When you are drinking you are never too busy to take a drink and never too busy not to stop. You are busy all the time—but get nowhere. Work is the curse of the drinking classes.

Any man who has been accustomed to do the kind of drinking I did for twenty years, who likes the sociability and the companionship of it, will find that the sudden transition to a non-drinking life

will leave him with a pretty dull existence on his hands until he gets reorganized. This is the depressing part of it. You have nowhere to go and nothing to do. Still, though you may miss the fun of the evening, you have all your drinking friends lashed to the mast in the morning.

By the Same Author

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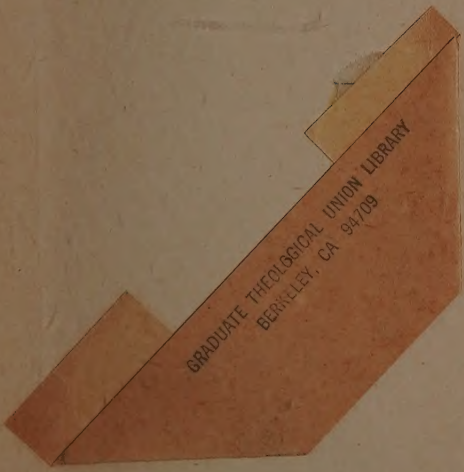

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